



EL CLARIN

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey
Update

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ASPIRA, INC. OF NEW JERSEY ELECTS A NEW CHAIRPERSON

Ms. Noemi Velazquez has accepted the top leadership position on the ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey executive board.

Born in Puerto Rico, Ms. Velazquez was educated within the Buffalo public school system in New York state. After spending one year at the University of Puerto Rico, she returned to the mainland to continue her education and received both her Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Arts degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She has also earned a Master's degree in supervision and administration from Jersey City State College.

Her academic concentration has been in elementary, secondary and bilingual education. She is presently a candidate in the Ed. D. Program at Seton Hall and has just returned from a summer

in Madrid where she was a Juan Carlos Scholar.

Ms. Velazquez has a long history of advocacy for Hispanic issues in many organizations, including but not limited to: Jersey City's Puerto Rican Association of Community Organizations, the Hispanic Women's Task Force and ASPIRA affiliates of New Jersey and New York. Currently, Ms. Velazquez is an educator for the Jersey City School District. Welcome to this labor of love.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March
Corporate
Luncheon

April
Youth Conference

May
Legal Careers
Conference

June
Awards Night
Ceremony

The Mission...

Our mission is the educational and leadership development of Puerto Rican and Latino youth so that they become empowered individuals who make significant contributions to the Puerto Rican and Latino community, in particular, and society in general.

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The Symbol of ASPIRA

The "pitirre" is a small fragile tropical bird found on the island of Puerto Rico. It is known for its agility and rapid flight and for its ability to outsmart, tire out and defeat much larger birds.

Exxon Chemical Company recently donated a grant worth \$9,900 to ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey. The grant, which was offered under the Exxon's Community Summer Jobs Program, is being used to underwrite the wages of six students working in ASPIRA's summer program. We thank you for your support.

The students, *Aspirantes*, Natasha Merez, Sigfredo Trujillo, Joan Gonzalez, Adalis Alvarez, Marcia Del Rios and Joanna Santiago were all placed in various not for profit organization positions in and around the greater Newark area.

Natasha Merez works at St. Columbus Neighborhood Club where she assists the teachers with the children who attend the club. Natasha is a junior at Cornell University majoring in economics. She hails from Newark.

On the job training and community volunteerism... an undefeatable combination.

Joan Gonzalez, a senior at NJIT, designs databases for La Casa de Don Pedro. He describes his work as basically "on the job training." He anticipates applying his knowledge in his computer science class upon his return to school. Joan also instructs the students in La Casa how to use WordPerfect and Windows.

Joanna Santiago, a recent graduate from Bloomfield High School, is a student intern at La Casa Senior Citizens Center. Her duties clerical work and working with the elderly. She finds that working with the elderly to be the most enjoyable and enriching part of her internship.

All the work performed by the interns is highly important to these organizations and to the communities in which they are located. This is but one reason that continued support to ASPIRA and similar organizations is necessary. These organizations will allow the neighborhoods and the youth they serve to thrive.



In Search of . . .

ASPIRA, INC. OF NEW JERSEY is trying to locate and identify its alumni. If you are one or know of one, please contact us and let us know.

The ASPIRANTES of today need to know of the ASPIRANTES of yesterday.

Please call ASPIRA's Executive Office at (201) 484-7554. Ask for Carmen Nazario.

*"Peace within humanity,
The defense of the rights and
Prerogatives of the culture
For the benefit of all.
The motivation of studies
and efforts,
Dedication to the task of
stimulating
Within myself and others
Excellence in the fields of
Sciences, Arts and Professions,
for the service of our
community in
New Jersey and wherever
we may find ourselves..."*

Part of "El Arroyo"

THE ASPIRANTE CORNER...

Luz Perez is a sophomore at Trenton Central High School. She is also the President of the ASPIRA Club and aspires to study businesses and/or foreign languages.

Q: What do think is the greatest obstacle that affects youth today?

A: I feel uncomfortable in school because the Latinos aren't included in Histories or professions. Everything is a black-white issue and no one talks about the Puerto Ricans.

Q: Is there anything positive that affects youth today?

A: ASPIRA and after school activities. ASPIRA gives students counseling and tells you about positive things... workshops about Latinos and Puerto Ricans, colleges, etc... I think that is real good.

Natalie Harrison is a 9th grader at Trenton Central High School.

Q: What do think is the greatest obstacle that affects youth today?

A: Fighting each other, killing each other. Sooner or later we are all going to go away [die], but everyone should get along like

brothers and sisters. People are people, no matter who they are. To get respect, one has to earn respect. If they treat themselves with respect, they earn respect.

Q: Is there anything positive that affects youth today?

A: No. [Natalie does recognize the positive relationship she has with her mother.]

Yazminelli Gonzalez is a Trenton Central High School Sophomore and is the Secretary of the ASPIRA Club. She aspires to be a teacher.

Q: What do think is the greatest obstacle that affects youth today?

A: Teenage pregnancy... there education is being affected and most won't be able to finish. They have to worry about baby sitters... And the drop-out problem, too. Not everyone is graduating as they are supposed to graduate.

Q: Is there anything positive that affects youth today?

A: [for me] ASPIRA helps me allot and keeps me on track. They've introduced me to colleges, etc.

AmeriCorps & ASPIRA - A Perfect Union- Part I

The ASPIRA/AmeriCorps Community Service Program, established in 1994 as part of the AmeriCorps National Service Network, is an 11-month school-based service program which trains and places corps member to work in predominantly Hispanic urban middle and high schools. The program operates in three cities: Bridgeport, CT; Newark, NJ; and Philadelphia, PA.

The objectives of the program is 1) to increase the academic success of leadership development of Latino youth and their families, 2) to promote community volunteerism and partnerships, and 3) to increase the training, skills and educational opportunity of corps members. In exchange for the 11 month commitment, corps members receive:

- ◊ A modest living allowance of \$175 per week. Health care and child care is provided.
- ◊ An educational award worth \$4,725 to help pay for college, graduate school, vocational schools or payment of student loans.

The Award's Night Ceremony

On Friday, June 2nd, ASPIRA held it's Annual Awards Night Ceremony. This year's ceremony was held at Douglas College in New Brunswick.

The ceremony rewards ASPIRA students for academic achievement, leadership, their work within their communities and their commitment to ASPIRA.

Ten students were selected to receive certificates from each ASPIRA club; five were awarded the Leadership Development certificates while the other five, Academic Achievement certificates.

This year's "Aspirante of the Year" award was presented to Edwin Gonzalez of Camden. The recipient of the "Pitirre of the Year" award, which is presented to a middle school student, was Eric Troupe also of Camden.

The Aspirantes conclude the evening with *El Areyto*, a

ritual performed every year at the conclusion of the Award's

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Night Ceremony. The *Areyto* comes from a Taino ceremony during which tribal leaders praised the great deeds of

their heroes. During the ceremony, ASPIRA students promise to uphold the values of ASPIRA by swearing allegiance to the *Areyto* oath. The oath is a crowning moment for the students, many of whom are for the first time receiving honor and recognition for their achievements.

The Awards Night Ceremony is a positive and fraternal way for the students to end the school year. We wish them all continued success.



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